A Discussion Guide for

*Excellence in Teaching and Learning: The Quantum Learning System*

By Barbara K. Given and Bobbi DePorter

The following includes suggestions for group discussion leaders.

The authors of *Excellence in Teaching and Learning* assert that effective teaching and learning depend on two basic components: Culture and Cognition. They state that whereas schooling has traditionally focused on cognitive aspects of instruction, attention to components that address classroom culture is critical to effective teaching and learning. The authors provide evidence that without conscious and deliberate attention to classroom culture, little depth of learning can be accomplished. Therefore, the authors provide critical research data revealing differences between expert and experienced (but often ineffective) teachers.

**Supportive Emotional Atmosphere**

Of critical importance is a solid foundation for academic success prior to and accompanying instruction. That is, effective teaching is built on careful attention to creating a positive social milieu embedded within a supportive emotional atmosphere. Thus, students feel valued as they learn within an environment of mutual respect and camaraderie.

A discussion may begin by considering ways in which each of us supports student learning through aspects of social interactions and social learning. These, after all, are life skills that can make the difference between success and failure in school and employment.

*Discuss how individual teachers identify deliberate efforts to enhance social learning in the classroom. These may include development of small-group problem solving, tandem assignments, development of questioning skills, etc.*

*Facilitate a discussion on the social and emotional factors that influence learning.*

1. *Elicit from the large group a list of these factors.*
2. *In small groups teachers share what they do to address these factors.*
3. *Elicit strategies from each small group and write on flipchart.*
4. *Talk about the value of shared strategies that are implemented throughout the school.*
5. *Choose one to three strategies they’ll implement. Again in small groups—grade level or subject matter groups—discuss and document what each strategy looks and sounds like.*
6. *Schedule a date/time at which the staff shares progress toward implementation and results they are experiencing.*

The truth is, teacher preparation programs often neglect deliberate training in how to establish a positive social classroom climate even though there is a strong and long-held belief that students should respect themselves, each other, and their teachers. But how is mutual respect developed?
Interactive discussion re how teachers create a positive culture of learning. When all members of the community (classroom) practice and live by a consistent set of principles, then everyone knows what is expected and can support each other in social skill development.

1. Large group interactive discussion
   a. Ask: What is the impact of classroom culture on learning?
   b. Elicit responses.

2. Small group shares
   a. Ask: What do you do to create a positive culture of learning in your classroom?
   b. Allow five to eight minutes for sharing
   c. Elicit ideas.

3. Large group interactive discussion
   a. Ask: What else can we do to ensure that every day every student feels safe, supported, and that they belong here?
   b. Elicit and chart.

4. Small group shares—grade level or subject matter
   Teachers choose an additional strategy or an enhancement to an existing strategy and discuss how to implement it.

8 Keys of Excellence

In Excellence in Teaching and Learning, Given and DePorter recommend the 8 Keys of Excellence as principles to live by for both teachers and students. When all members of a group agree on specific principles to live by, such as the 8 Keys, community bonds grow stronger. The 8 Keys are as follows:

- This Is It: Make the most of every moment.
- Ownership: Take responsibility for the results of your actions.
- Speak with Good Purpose: Make certain your intention is positive and your words are sincere. Think before you speak.
- Failure Leads to Success: Learn from mistakes.
- Commitment: Take positive action to make your dreams happen.
- Integrity: Match behavior with values.
- Flexibility: Be willing to do things differently to achieve desired results.
- Balance: Be mindful of self and others while focusing on what’s meaningful and important in your life.

Show the Key motions and practice them collectively and/or individually.

Let’s explore one of the Keys—Integrity. Think of core values you live by each day to be successful in your chosen profession and then consider how you implement your values. Do words and actions match your values?
In small groups discuss and list common values. Then share and discuss as a whole group if desired.

1. Individual. List three to five positive values and beliefs you have about students and learning.
2. Partners. Share values and talk about how they show up in your classrooms.

Without question, living the 8 Keys can make the difference between success and failure in school and in life. For teachers, several core beliefs strengthen the 8 Keys and their relevance in teaching excellence:

1. all students can learn and succeed when taught by effective teachers
2. uncompromising honesty about our personal teaching proficiency
3. commitment to ongoing personal and professional growth
4. being open and receptive to new learning
5. embracing best teaching practices based on research evidence
6. a strong desire to excel as a teacher

Let’s look at each of these core beliefs and consider specific ways we can practice them. In groups of three, discuss:

1. What can we do to show our sincere belief that each student can learn and succeed?
2. In what ways can we demonstrate an honest and sincere understanding of ourselves and our ability to teach?
3. How much do we value learning new skills intended to increase our effectiveness?
4. What can we read and study, and what workshops and interactions can help us focus on developing our teaching skills.
5. What does research tell us about how to be effective and how can we deliberately and purposefully implement new strategies to help students learn?
6. How committed are we to becoming the most effective teachers we can be and ensuring that all students excel.

With these basic beliefs, we practice the 8 Keys of Excellence on an ongoing basis and serve as a model for teaching students how to practice, develop and live by these strong principles.

Facilitate a discussion about specific ways the 8 Keys can be practiced throughout the school culture.

1. Ask the staff, in what ways can we collectively practice living each of the 8 Keys?
2. Ask students, in what ways can they practice living each of the Keys?

Teachers gather in small groups to discuss specific Keys and then share with the whole group initial thoughts about how to help ourselves and students internalize the 8 Keys.

To further the implementation of the Keys in your school culture, create Key Teams. The intention of these teams is to focus on behavior that demonstrates how to live the 8 Keys—or how not to live the Keys. “Which Key is challenging you right now?” can be a positive way to point out behavior that is not consistent with the 8 Keys.

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Successfully “living” the 8 Keys of Excellence has a very positive effect on students, teachers, classrooms, and schools.